

News Release

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Premier Mike Rann

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Change

Hon Karlene Maywald

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RANN'S BID TO SAVE MORE THAN 100 GIGS OF RIVER MURRAY WATER

The SA Government will push for Commonwealth support for more than \$500 million in priority projects that could result in water savings of more than 100 gigalitres of water in the Murray Darling Basin system.

Premier Mike Rann will present South Australia's projects – *Murray Futures* – at tomorrow's COAG meeting in Sydney as the State's priority bid for funding under the \$12.9 billion Water for the Future program.

“Murray Futures focuses on three key areas - securing future water supplies, renewing industries and communities, and securing improvements to the river's health by providing flexibility in how the system is managed in South Australia,” Mr Rann said.

“Murray Futures is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get it right for the river in South Australia - from the Murray mouth right through to the border.

“At the top of the list will be a project worth in excess of \$100 million to completely re-engineer the water infrastructure within the townships, communities and irrigators that draw water from the Lower Lakes.

“The Lower Lakes are in a dire condition and the current drought – the worst on record – means it is failing those communities that rely on it for drinking water and irrigation of crops and stock,” Mr Rann said.

“Our plan would end the use of water from the Lower Lakes by those communities and vastly improve their water security and water quality.

“Instead, they would be connected to high quality water drawn from the River Murray at around Tailem Bend via a new integrated network of pipelines around the Lower Lakes communities and farms that would link to the existing pipelines.

“Irrigation pipelines will be built to supply to Currency Creek and Langhorne Creek and potable water pipes will go to the Narrung and Paltalloch Peninsulas and the Raukkan Aboriginal Community.

“Aspects of this project can start almost immediately if we were able to get cracking on it, and the entire project could be finished within two years.

“In addition, we would be seeking about \$200 million to undertake medium to long term projects around the Lower Lakes and Coorong to help save and protect the future of this valuable Ramsar site.

“This would include investigating and consulting the community on a range of new infrastructure works that would enable the better environmental management of the Lower Lakes – especially in terms of diluting hyper-saline water from the southern lagoon of the Coorong and regulating the flow of water between the lakes.

“Another major priority project would be to secure more than \$150 million to reinvigorate our Riverland irrigation industries.

“This overhaul of the way in which Riverland irrigators manage their farms and the wider industry would be a voluntary process developed in partnership with the irrigation industry – and if taken up as an option by enough irrigators, it could transform the economy and environment in that area.

“This project would present a suite of options that include modernising irrigation technology, adopting new production systems including new crop types that use less water, open up new areas that are more environmentally sustainable and moving production from areas suffering from high salinity.

“Depending on how many people take up these options, it is estimated the project could save up to 100 gigalitres, of which 50 gigalitres would be made available for industry renewal.

“Also on our priority list is a project that would cost in excess of \$80 million that involves removing pumps from backwaters and wetlands to the main stem of the river for hundreds of irrigators to improve their security of supply and quality of water.

“By changing where those users access water, we could save about 50 gigalitres of River Murray water because we could cut evaporation losses and allow these wetlands to be managed more sustainably so they could fill and dry out when necessary,” Mr Rann said.

“It will position South Australia to respond to the longer term challenges facing the River Murray, particularly in a future of reduced water availability and climate change.

“While South Australia’s irrigation communities are the most efficient along the whole river and have been for many years, we need to position ourselves to use water smarter and do more with less.

“It is vital for all South Australians that we secure the long-term future of our communities, our water supplies and our river environment which are currently under extreme pressure due to the severe drought, on the back of decades of over-allocation.

“Community consultation to develop specific details of the industrial renewal package will be a vital part of rolling out Murray Futures across irrigation industries.”

Even with our project proposals, there remains a need for action by the Commonwealth and the other States to improve the health of the river, its floodplain and its wetlands.

South Australia is seeking to strengthen its partnership with the Commonwealth and with other Murray Darling Basin jurisdictions to deliver a “One River” approach.

Mr Rann says he looks forward to finalising the Intergovernmental Agreement on Murray-Darling Basin reform, which will be a very significant step forward in establishing a national approach to managing the Basin.

“South Australia has lobbied hard for over-allocation upstream to be addressed, the provision of water for critical human needs to be seen as the priority, the capacity for SA to store water in upstream storages to meet its critical human needs and for an Independent Authority to manage the Murray-Darling Basin.”